

## Written evidence submitted by the London Borough of Hackney

1. The London Borough of Hackney borders the River Lea, known to be one of the most polluted rivers in the country. During lockdown, a section of the River known as Hackney Beach became an infamous spot for wild swimming, with those participating either unaware of or undaunted by the frequent discharges of effluent. Despite the efforts of local people, campaign groups and the Council, notably through engagement with the Environment Agency and Thames Water, progress is extremely slow. Having evaluated the call for evidence, the Council believes that the following three questions relate to Hackney:
2. **How effective are the planning policy and standards around sustainable drainage systems to reduce urban diffuse pollution in England?**
  - 2.1. Sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) are predominantly used in developments to control water quantity rather than quality. Currently, Hackney has little to no sites that have a direct discharge into the river and under the recently adopted Local Plan 33 the following section 58.F Water Pollution should be noted;
  - 2.2. *'New developments should not pose an unacceptable risk to water quality and developments which have the potential to adversely impact on water quality, in the opinion of Hackney and the Environment Agency, will be required to provide appropriate mitigation to alleviate the risk.'*
  - 2.3. Therefore, water quality is taken into account within Hackney's planning policy but SuDS that are implemented in the public realm are primarily there to capture surface runoff. Moreover, due to the presence of combined sewers in Hackney, flooding is generally given priority over water quality when work is undertaken on drains.
3. **Should Local Authorities and highways agencies be given a duty to prevent pollution to watercourses without prior treatment?**
  - 3.1. Thames Water is the organisation that issues Trade Effluent Licences in Hackney and by allowing the Local Authority to undertake audits on sites that are discharging directly into a watercourse, an extra layer of scrutiny will be added.
  - 3.2. However, in practice this may prove difficult and it may complicate matters if there is more than one delegated authority. Additional resources should be given to the Environment Agency to allow for more frequent monitoring of these sites.
4. **How can consumers be persuaded to change their behaviour to minimise pollution?**
  - 4.1. The Council is a member of a catchment partnership that includes the Environment Agency, Charities and other Local Authorities. The partnership as a collective can use our position to play a role in raising awareness of the issues of river quality and how it

can impact health. This could be in the form of a campaign aiming to change people's attitude towards certain behaviours that are detrimental to the environment. Hackney has a very environmentally aware lobby who would support a focussed campaign on water quality. If sufficient funding was allocated to the partnership, a joint campaign on minimising pollution could be effective. However, it is also integral that the local water company is a part of this effort. Without the involvement of these stakeholders the likelihood of the campaign being successful would be low. In order to tackle the issue, there needs to be a degree of coordination and oversight. The Council would support further meaningful engagement with water companies. However, the Regulator and national Government must play a consequential role in ensuring that water companies engage with Local Authorities and other stakeholders and invest in delivering significant improvements in a timely manner.

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